

1941: SOVIET MOBILIZATION FOR A FIRST STRIKE

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ABSTRACT

After Stalin's failed negotiations with Britain and the subsequent signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop treaty, the Soviet Union looked to gather the resulting spoils from the west's war with Nazi Germany. As Hitler's military continued to gain quick victories throughout Europe, Stalin's calculations were soon stalled. Stalin now realized that a battle with Germany was inevitable. What followed from this point onward are Stalin's attempts to upgrade the Red Army for war. I will argue that Stalin planned to strike Germany first. Evidence for this claim will base itself in the military doctrine of the Red Army, which has always been based on offensive strategies. The documentation of Soviet war plans point towards this direction.

However, in order for the Soviet offensive to be successful, certain force levels would have to be attained. In the end, the Germans attacked first, while Soviet troops were in the preparatory stages of mobilization.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Seventy-five years have passed since the outbreak of war between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Nevertheless, questions concerning the foreign policy of the Soviet Union from 1939-41, along with offensive intentions (if any) of the Red Army against Germany before Hitler's first strike remain debatable. Evan Mawdsley (2002) explains that two general historical interpretations have emerged as a result (818). One accepts the long-held view that Moscow's diplomacy and strategy in 1941 was "defensive, pragmatic and essentially passive in the face of German danger" (818). The other, more controversial argument centers on "significant offensive and active elements – military, diplomatic, or even ideological – in Russian policy at this time" (818). In the West, two of the leading authorities of the defensive, "traditionalist" view, are Gabriel Gorodetsky and David Glantz who have produced book-length rebuttals to Rezun-Suvorov's controversial *Icebreaker* thesis in which they not only stress that a notion of a German preventative attack is farfetched, but that the Red Army was in no way ready, prepared or ordered to be used offensively (Mawdsley 820). The "Revisionists" who retain some of Rezun-Suvorov's claims, include historians like Joachim Hoffmann and Walter Post, along with Western scholars such as C.S Raack and Daniel W. Michaels who stress the role of political ideology of Stalinist foreign policy, while others like Mikhail Meltyukhov and Lennart Samuelson document the notion that Soviet military mobilization was well underway in the Soviet Union before 1941.

For the purposes of this paper, my argument will remain focused on the perspectives of the latter group. I aim to oppose the traditional western historical narrative that Stalin ignored the growing threat of Hitler to the Soviet Union, choosing to remain passively on the sidelines until the inevitable opposition attack. The preparation of several war plans, including the consequent Timoshenko-Zhukov plan of May 1941 show a different narrative, in which Stalin schemed to put the May 1941 plan into action after realizing that the events following the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Treaty were not in his favor. However, the Red Army was not able to organize itself in time – though they tried. Evidence of mobilization confirms this. Employing Evan Mawdsley (2003) as one of my main sources, I will argue that the May Plan of 1941 was not counter-offensive to a German first strike, but a recommended first strike by the Red Army to catch the German forces while they were deploying rather than defending. Although the prescribed numbers of forces were not reached by June 1941, production rates allow us to assume that Soviet Forces would have been ready for 1942. Consequently, Hitler's forces struck first and caught the Red Army in the early stages of deployment.

Meltyukhov's (2000) research into the development of Soviet forces indicates that the Soviet military had around 2.5 million troops in total before the war, but increased substantially by 140% to reach 5.7 million in 1941 (497-504). Such evidence allows us to deduce that Germany's quick rise to power prompted a monstrous build up of Soviet troops in preparation for possibility of war. Seeing that his plan for a long war between the Allied Nations and the Nazis was spoiled by quick victories from Germany, Stalin prepared the USSR for an offensive. Summoning the Soviet commissar for Defence,

Timoshenko, and the Chief of Staff of the Red Army, Zhukov, to prepare a detailed plan in May of 1941 for a pre-emptive strike against the German forces that were assembling in German-occupied Poland, Stalin preferred waiting until he reached total superiority with armaments before casting the first strike. Under this proposed war plan, a Soviet force of 152 divisions, along with 3000-4000 aircraft would launch a surprise attack on the German Forces stationed in southern Poland (Mawdsley 818). Ultimately, no Soviet attack came that summer, as certain force levels would have to be attained in order for a Soviet offensive to be deemed successful. Instead, when news broke of the impending German invasion, Stalin ordered the preparations to be made for putting the May plan into action. The Soviet Union pursued a last-ditch effort to scramble troops for an early, and likely unsuccessful offensive in the late summer of 1941. However, Soviet troops could not be organized on time. When German Wehrmacht launched its first strike on June 22, 1941, the Red Army was caught in the midst of implementing the preparatory stages of the May plan. In hindsight, one is tempted to wonder what would happen if the Soviet Union launched its preemptive strike in mid June when the discrepancy between the total of stationed opposing forces was not as large as then seemed.

CHAPTER 2

THE MOLOTOV-RIBBENTROP TREATY IN CONTEXT

In order to affirm the notion that Stalin was preparing to launch an offensive strike on Nazi Germany, it is important to examine the period between the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Treaty on August 23, 1939 and the German invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. One of the essential questions concerns the nature of the Soviet-German relationship and its potential state in the future. Was the signing of the pact a sign of a relationship that could sustain itself in the future? On the other hand, if Stalin believed that armed conflict with Germany was inevitable, did he plan to adopt a defensive stance or take up the initiative to launch a preemptive attack?

Such questions are further complicated by the development of Germany's war with the west. Documentation provides us with some insight on Stalin's mindset, suggesting the idea that he presumed the war between Germany and the Allied nations would leave both sides exhausted and vulnerable to Soviet advances. However, to what extent did the German victories at the start of the war influence his strategy? The change, if any, must be carefully considered as well in order to accurately judge Stalin's intentions.

Nazi Germany and the USSR signed a Treaty of Non-Aggression on August 23, 1939. In an analysis of the Soviet Union's planned offensive against Germany, it is important to note that Stalin was ready to sign an alliance with Western powers, provided that his conditions were met. However, if his demands were not accepted, Stalin would just as well make a pact with Hitler. Carefully dealing his cards, Stalin's main objective

was to place the Soviet Union in a position from which it could be of most benefit. Stalin finally signed for a non-aggression pact for this very reason. However, within a year of realizing that this treaty was not in the best interest of the USSR, Stalin began to alter his strategy. Richard Tedor (2002), and Daniel W. Michaels (1999), often cite German politician and researcher Adolf von Thadden's (1996) *Stalins Falle: Er wollte den Krieg* (whose work remains untranslated into English and largely ignored by Western historians). Thadden's thorough research into German and Russian archives, along with extensive documentation of Stalin's speeches from 1939-1943 help shed more insight into Stalin's new strategy.

In the spring of 1939, the Soviet negotiations with London and Paris reached a peak point when the Allies asked Moscow to co-sign a guarantee by the Anglo-French delegation – protecting Romania and Poland from the threat of German aggression (Tedor 27). The Soviets expressed their commitment to the proposal as long as Lithuania, Poland and Romania allowed for the passage of Soviet troops in the event that war broke out. Poland refused, with Jozef Beck, the Polish foreign minister, indicating that, if Poland aligned itself with Soviet Russia, this would undoubtedly lead to a “serious” German reaction (Neilson 275). With the French opposed to the Soviet plan as it stood and the Romanians sharing the Poles' fears that any agreement with Soviet Russia might yield a German attack, the Soviet offer was declined (284). Prime Minister Chamberlain's view of this obstacle was both publicly and privately expressed. He stressed Poland's fear of Germany, and noted that, in such circumstances, Warsaw would likely reject the four-power proposal. This created further doubts in Britain itself, wondering whether they

should continue negotiating with Soviet Russia. "I must confess to the most pronounced distrust of Russia," the prime minister wrote:

I have no belief whatever in her ability to maintain an effective offensive even if she wanted to. And I distrust her motives which seem to me have little connection with our ideas of liberty and to be concerned only with getting every one else by the ears. Moreover she is both hated and suspected by many of the smaller states . . . so that our close association with her might easily cost us the sympathy of those who would much more effectively help us if we can get them on our side. (Chamberlain qtd. in Neilson 276-277)

Soviet Russia's military capabilities were judged to be limited to the Allies; joining with it would both "annoy the Poles and Romanians and allow Germany to trumpet the Red menace. Thus, 'from the practical point of view, there was every argument against accepting the Russian proposal' " (Neilson 283-284). Despite these hindrances, the negotiations stretched into the summer with little progress (Neilson 298). Adding to the difficulties of terms, the Soviet Union wished to be covered should its commitments to the Baltic States involve it in war. The Soviet commissar rejected any proposal that "did not specifically name the eight countries that Britain, France and Soviet Russia would defend." British Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax professed himself "bewildered" by Molotov's reply. In a tactfully excised phrase, the foreign secretary noted: "I realize the difficulty of dealing with a man of such inarticulate obstinacy" (Neilson 303). "The Russian business is quite infuriating", Halifax wrote on 7 July, "it blocks everything and frays everybody's nerves." On 15 July, Chamberlain wrote that Halifax was "at last

getting ‘fed up’ with Molotov whom he describes as ‘maddening’ ” (Neilson 308). Chamberlain himself was irate that Britain had “made concession after concession” without any Soviet reciprocation and the foreign secretary noted that the Soviets “were content to go on bargaining so as to secure the highest terms possible” (Neilson 305).

The last is an important point because it shows insight into Stalin’s frame of thinking. It is true that the personalities involved complicated the negotiations, but that is irrelevant to our case; instead, the most important deduction from these encounters of spring and summer of 1941, is that Stalin was decisively involved in a chess match, musing at the Western concessions through Molotov, while trying to gain as much from the Allied powers as possible. There must have been a clear plan of action already in place – one on which Stalin would always fall back on. If the Allied governments failed to make concessions with the Soviets, then Stalin would turn to Hitler. In both scenarios, Stalin hoped to impose such demands that would be tactically advantageous to the Soviet Union.

Two weeks before the war broke out in 1939, senior Soviet and Anglo-French officers held a delegation in Moscow on August 12th. In 2008, papers that were kept secret for over 70 years, revealed the fact that the Soviets were prepared to send a robust military force to persuade Britain and France to join an anti-Nazi alliance (Holdsworth 2008). In particular, the size of this force is important to note as it showcases a military might that must have been in stages of build up for quite some time, and not without a purpose (Soviet immobilization campaign will be discussed in the next chapter).

The chief of the general staff, Boris Shaposhnikov, Defense Commissar Kliment Voroshilov and the naval minister, Adm. Nikolai Kusnezov represented the Soviet Union (Tedor 27). The declassified documents reveal that war minister Marshall Klementi Voroshilov, along with Red Army chief of general staff Boris Shaposhnikov made a Soviet offer to the Allied delegation – proposing for a large number of infantry, airborne and artillery forces to be dispatched by Stalin’s generals. In total, an allowance of 120 infantry divisions (each consisting of some 19,000 troops), 9500 tanks, 5000 heavy artillery pieces, 16 cavalry divisions, along with 5500 bombers and fight aircraft could potentially be directed against Germany if war with the West was to break out (Holdsworth 2008).

In order for this to happen, however, Poland would have to allow the Red Army to cross through its territory. The obstacle in place was that both Poland and Romania had a defensive military alliance against the USSR and would not allow the Soviets to cross their soil. According to the report made by Shaposhnikov on August 15th, three main variants were discussed: If Germany attacked the Western allies, the USSR would commit 70% of the Forces used by the Western allies against German territory through the Vilnius corridor and Lithuania and through Galician corridor if needed. Secondly, if Germany attacked Poland or Romania, the USSR would commit 100% of the Western Allied Forces through the Vilnius and Galician corridors. Finally, if Germany attacked the USSR through the territory of the Baltic States, the USSR would use all the forces available – including all 120 infantry and 16 cavalry divisions (Carley 165, 185-205).

The British and French sides – not authorized to make any deals by their respective

governments – did not respond to this Soviet offer made on August 15, 1939. The leader of the British delegation was Admiral Sir Reginald Drax, and as he told to his Soviet counterparts, he was not of the authority to make any deals – only to talk. He also had his bargaining terms clearly defined at a series of meetings of the deputy chiefs of staff (DCOS). The most interesting aspect was what the DCOS believed to be the military capabilities of the Soviets and the nature of their character. With respect to the former, there were three general points: the Red Army Purges had “impaired the effectiveness” of all branches of the Soviet armed forces, the Soviet Army’s size was “misleading” in relation to its strength, and the Soviets were “ ‘most unwilling’ to allow their forces to be located in areas where they might be infected by ‘bourgeois influence’ ” (Neilson 311).

On 17 August the conference in Moscow adjourned until 21 August, pending the results of the Anglo-French efforts. Negotiations were difficult and Drax had found the Soviets to “speak contemptuously of Britain and France as the yielding (or surrendering) Powers.” The Soviet manner further seemed to indicate that Stalin saw himself as the one to dictate terms, viewing Britain and France as those nations in need of Russian assistance: “The way they hand to us their demands (not requests) is somewhat in the manner of a victorious power dictating terms to a beaten enemy. They make it plain that in their opinion we come here as supplicants” (Neilson 313).

Coupled with the uncompromising and suspecting tone with which both sides approached the negotiations in Moscow, the Polish government would not grant passage rights to the Soviet government and no agreement could be reached on the Baltic States either; the Soviets wanted to have the right to decide when these States would need Soviet

assistance, while the British delegation did not want the Baltic States to be assisted against their will. Consequently, the Allied delegation left and Stalin turned to Germany – signing the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on August 23, 1939 – just a week later – right before Nazi Germany decided to attack Poland and spark the start of World War II.

On May 3, 1939 Stalin attempted to revitalize friendly terms with Germany by removing USSR's foreign commissar, Maxim Litvinov. Litvinov previously allied the USSR with Czechoslovakia and France, identifying himself with Moscow's "anti-German foreign policy of the decade" (Tedor 27). Stalin's replacement of Litvinov with Vyatsheslav Molotov was recognized as a "gesture" toward Germany (27). Failed negotiations between the Soviets and the West, allowed Stalin to choose to side with Hitler as he had no other alternative which would allow him to stall for time. The fact that Stalin chose Molotov, already replacing Litvinov, as to better his relations with Germany hints at his plans for expansion, and thus, siding with Germany would benefit the long term Soviet plan; thereby realizing that there was more to gain by siding with Germany.

Stalin decided on an agreement with Hitler that August. This non-aggression pact with Germany was enticing. In particular, advantages would come from the attainment of Eastern Poland, which the Soviets formerly controlled. In addition, the Germans supported Soviet claims on Bessarabia and agreed to define the Balkan and Baltic States as part of the Soviet "sphere of influence" (Tedor 27). A German-Soviet pact would further allow Hitler the "free hand" to invade Poland. Being Poland's ally, England would consequently declare war on Germany, dragging France into the conflict while Italy stood by Hitler's side (27). This would allow Stalin a more secure position from which to plan

for the next course of action for the advancement of Soviet dominance. Dragging the nations into war, Stalin hoped to stay neutral for as long as possible, waiting for an opportune moment to deliver a Soviet takeover of Europe.

Making his position clear in a speech in 1939, Stalin had clear ambitions for the Soviet Union, and the hope was that Germany and Western Europe would engage in a war while a neutral Soviet Union carefully waited on the sidelines, looking to collect the spoils from the battered “imperialist” nations (Tedor 27-28). In his speech in Moscow on March 10th, 1939 Stalin affirmed,

nonintervention represents the endeavor...to allow all the warmongers to sink deeply into the mire of warfare, to quietly urge them on. The result will be that they weaken and exhaust one another. Then...(we will) appear on the scene with fresh forces and step in, naturally ‘in the interest of peace,’ to dictate terms to the weakened belligerents. (Thadden 29, cited in Tedor 28)

After the historic pact was signed between Molotov and the German Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop on August 23, 1939, Stalin hosted a dinner party on the following evening. Attending the gathering at his apartment were prominent members of the Soviet Political Bureau, with Molotov, Voroshilov, Beria and Khrushchev amongst them (Tedor 28). Later recalling that evening, Khrushchev stated that Stalin considered the war with Germany unavoidable, but that he had bought some time by “momentarily trick[ing] Hitler” (28). Describing the treaty with Germany as a game of “who outwits whom,” the Soviet Premier concluded that the Soviet Union held both moral and military advantage over the Germans (Post 123, cited in Tedor 28). Several months later, the

Soviet Foreign Office explained Stalin's decision to its embassy in Tokyo: "The ratifying of our treaty with Germany was dictated by the need for a war in Europe" (Thadden 88, cited in Tedor 28). Only a few days later on August 25, 1939, the Swiss periodical *Revue de droit international* published the text of a speech given by Stalin on August 19. The speech was delivered to "a closed session" of the Political Bureau in Moscow. Quoting Stalin as follows in the publication, it stated:

It must be our objective that Germany wage war long enough to exhaust England and France so much that they cannot defeat Germany alone.... Should Germany win, it will itself be so weakened that it won't be able to wage war against us for 10 years.... It's paramount for us that this war continues as long as possible, until both sides are worn out. (Thadden 89-90, cited in Tedor 28)

In November 1939, Stalin responded in *Pravda*, calling the Swiss article a "heap of lies" (Tedor 28). However, Russian researcher T. S. Bushuyevoy discovered Stalin's original text in the former Soviet archives in 1994. The speech conformed to the Swiss version (28). It was published in a prominent Russian scholarly journal, as well as in an academic publication of Novosibirsk University (Michaels 1999). In a particularly revealing passage, Stalin further states:

Let us consider a second possibility, that is, a victory by Germany... It is obvious that Germany will be too occupied elsewhere to turn against us. In a conquered France, the French Communist Party will be very strong. The Communist revolution will break out unavoidably, and we will be able to fully exploit this situation to come to the aid of France and make it our ally. In addition, all the

nations that fall under the ‘protection’ of a victorious Germany will also become our allies. This presents for us a broad field of action in which to develop the world revolution. (Stalin qtd. in Michaels 1999)

If this address is authentic, closely following Stalin’s true intentions, then the military preparations following this speech of August 1939, falls in line with Soviet strategic policy at the time – ambitions to extend its borders, spread communist ideology and take advantage of a war that had the potential to cripple all of Europe, leaving the Soviet Union to develop its communist revolution.

Meanwhile, as the year progressed, the war in Europe was not conforming to Stalin’s expectations. The British had decided to withdraw from the continent in the spring of 1940, while the German army quickly conquered France in June without withstanding any sufficient damage. The ground war that Stalin hoped for was reaching its peak, and England and Germany were not “sufficiently worn down” (Tedor 28-29). Khrushchev later described how Stalin became unusually agitated following the Franco-German cease-fire in June 1940. He cursed the French for letting themselves be beaten and the English for fleeing "as fast as their legs could carry them” (Post 145 cited in Tedor 28-29).

It is important to note that when Stalin sent Molotov to Berlin to “renegotiate” the Hitler/Stalin Pact in November 1940, he made demands that Germany could not be reasonably expected to meet. In return for continued Soviet friendly neutrality, Stalin wanted most of Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Further showing his ambitions to expand, Stalin wanted German acceptance to a second Soviet invasion of Finland and

occupation of Bulgaria and Turkish territory bordering the Straits (Michaels 1999).

Obviously, Hitler could not have possibly said yes to Stalin's total conquest of all these areas, and at the same time maintain Germany's strategic position. More importantly, is the likelihood that Stalin understood the extremity of his demands perfectly well and knew that Hitler would not accept them. At this point, Stalin was surprised by the speed at which Germany had defeated France and the successful progress it was making in the war against Britain. This was worrisome for the Soviet Union precisely because its plan for a long, exhaustive war was being cut short and Hitler would soon begin to turn his sights toward the Soviet Union. Here, Stalin must have been fully prepared for the inevitability of war and was only stalling for time so as to deploy the Red Army into offensive positions.

From June 1940 onward, it became evident that Stalin helped ensure that Britain did not surrender to the Germans, and in turn, allow Germany to turn its full force against the Soviet Union. Stalin's main method of assistance to Britain involved the reduction of resources the Soviets would send to the Germans. In August 1940, Stalin drastically cut back the flow of resources intended for Germany, significantly weakening its powers to wage war at prior pace. However, the plan to do this only further infuriated Hitler and sped up the impending threat:

...the raw materials which the Russians were withholding were essential to us. In spite of their obligations their rate of delivery decreased steadily, and there was a real danger that they might suddenly cease altogether. If they were not prepared to give us of their own free will the things we had to have, then we had no

alternative but to go and take them, in situ and by force. (Hitler qtd. in Bormann 1961)

An important point worth mentioning involves Stalin's agreement with Yugoslavia after British and American intelligence agencies orchestrated an anti-German coup. This stalled Germany forcing it to act against the threat of Soviet influence; thereby, delaying the time for the redeployment of its forces along the Soviet border. Subsequently, Germany launched an invasion of Yugoslavia launched on April 6, 1941, delaying the Barbarossa attack against the USSR by several weeks until their forces could be redeployed again to the Soviet border (Michaels 1999). Von Thadden (1996) cites, for example, the Nuremberg testimony of Hermann Göring from March 15, 1946 to confirm the German frustrations with Stalin (his motives now in clear view):

The new Yugoslav government, quite obviously and beyond doubt, clearly stood in closest relationship with the enemies we had at that time, that is to say, England and, in this connection, with the enemy to be, Russia. The Simovic affair was definitely the final and decisive factor that dispelled the Führer's very last scruples about Russia's attitude, and prompted him to take preventive measures in that direction under all circumstances. (Nuremberg, vol. 9, 333-334 cited in Michaels 1999)

Similarly, on February 15 1945, Hitler himself reflected on USSR's growing anti-German stance, if the documents published in English, as "Hitler's Political Testament" is to be trusted:

....in view of the steadily increasing power of our western enemies, if we were to

act at all, we had to do so with the least possible delay. Nor, mind you, was Stalin doing nothing [...], the main problem was to keep the Russians from moving for as long as possible, and my own personal nightmare was the fear that Stalin might take the initiative before me. (Hitler qtd. in Bormann 1961)

Hitler went on to state that,

War with Russia had become inevitable, whatever we did; and to postpone it only meant that we should later have to fight under conditions far less favorable. I therefore decided, as soon as Molotov departed, that I would settle accounts with Russia as soon as fair weather permitted. (Hitler qtd. in Bormann 1961)

It appears that Stalin made his decision not to join Britain and France in waging war on Germany, as early as August 19th, 1939, when he delivered his “closed session” speech to the Politburo in Moscow. Preferring to stay neutral for as long as possible instead, Stalin hoped for a long war to loom over Germany and the Anglo-French alliance. When both sides exhausted, the Soviet Union would hope to extend its reach over Europe.

On one hand, if Germany were quickly defeated, the British and French occupation of the country would shift the balance of power in favor of the West – preventing any kind of communist revolution that might be possible if the war raged to an exhaustive end. In another scenario, a quick defeat of the Allies would put the Soviet Union at risk of a German attack at a time when Red Army was not yet prepared for its own offensive. Undoubtedly, this was the scenario that Stalin least considered and thus, least prepared for. Considering the British and French military power far superior to that of the Wehrmacht, he, like other world leaders, was shocked at the outcome.

Thus, Stalin's strategic thinking in the summer of 1939 was not the same as it was in the summer of 1940. Stalin's statement on 19 August 1939, the day on which he decided to enter into a non-aggression pact with Germany, allows us to form a reasonable impression of his strategic thinking at that time. It is likely that after the failed negotiations with Britain and France, Stalin opted to choose a more advantageous position for the Soviet Union, allowing the USSR to play the role of a bystander until both sides would be too weak to resist a Communist uprising and a westward advance of the Red Army. Such expansionist ambitions were already evidenced through the Soviet annexation of the Baltic States, the eastern Polish provinces, Bessarabia and Bukovina, his invasion of Finland, and the demands voiced by Molotov in Berlin in November 1940 for a German agreement to a second Soviet invasion of Finland and occupation of Bulgaria and Turkish territory bordering the Straits.

However, because of the short war of 1940 causing the defeat of France, the near collapse of Britain and a massive rise of German economic power, a drastic change had to be enacted in Stalin's strategic plan. How was Stalin going to deal with a situation in which Germany dominated most of Europe? What followed was an intense scramble to mobilize the Soviet Union for war. By initializing the Zhukov-Timoshenko May Plan of 1941, Stalin solidified his intention for an offensive on Germany in the late summer of 1941 (at the earliest).

CHAPTER 3

THE SOVIET-MILITARY INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

The possibility of conquering Russia would have led to the creation of a new German empire in Central and Eastern Europe. When Hitler launched his armies against the Soviet Union in 1941, most of the world did not have high hopes for the USSR. After all, in the fields of Scandinavia and the Mediterranean, the Germans had just proved that they had the mightiest army in Europe (Harrison, “The USSR and Total War” 137). Secondly, the haunting remnants of WWI still remained: In 1914-1917, the Russian economy struggled to keep its forces mobilized until it eventually crashed – plunging the entire country into political and economic ruin – forcing the Russian Revolution (137). Based on the experience of World War I, Hitler expected a seemingly poor country like the Soviet Union, whose size and military equipment (based on what was known) did not impress the Nazis, would be unable to offer more than a brief resistance from its military. Harrison (2001) remarks that although Hitler’s “knowledge of history and economics was otherwise lamentable, in this at least he had both on his side” (“Providing For Defense” 90).

However, the time the Soviet economy and military supply did not disintegrate. Expectations were overturned and the German army was “overwhelmed by the scale and scope of Soviet Resistance” (Harrison, “The USSR and Total War” 137). In this war, “the Soviet Union was the only country to undergo a serious invasion without collapsing promptly” (Harrison, “Providing For Defense” 90).

How was this possible? Harrison notes that production was decisive and the Soviets outproduced the German military. Even though the Soviet economy was less developed, during the course of the war, they supplied more soldiers and weapons. In order to truly understand the likelihood of this feat, it is necessary to examine the “scale of Soviet war preparations and their possible motivations” (Harrison, “The USSR and Total War” 137).

Harrison (2001) explains that achievements during this decade were “seven times as many regular soldiers and twenty times as many items of military equipment (in units of 1937) being produced as ten years previously” (“Providing for Defense” 86). Both Nikolai Simonov and Lennart Samuelson have done extensive studies in the Soviet archives, documenting this process of “investment in mobilization preparedness” (86). In their work they make it evident that by the late 1930s, the majority of Soviet industrial establishments were converted into military complexes with “specific mobilization assignments” (86). In the Foreword to “Plans for Stalin’s War machine: Tukhachevskii and Military-Economic Planning, 1925-1941”, by Lennart Samuelson, Vitalii Shlykov (former Russian deputy minister of defence and founder of the influential Council for Foreign and Defence Policy) makes it clear that despite the “scale and intensity” of the Soviet mobilizations before the Second World War, “preparations were inadequately evaluated and understood both by Western Sovietologists and by the wartime adversaries of the Soviet Union, especially Germany” (xiii). Frankly, Soviet armaments production was so rapid in development that between 1932 and the second half of the 1930s, the USSR “produced more tanks and aircraft than the whole of the rest of the world” (xiii). Evidently, this fact came as a disguise: namely, that the main efforts of the Soviet leaders

in those years were not directed to armaments production, along with the rapid supply of new technology to the army, “but to the development of the basic branches of the economy such as iron and steel, machine-building, and fuel and power, providing the foundation for the expansion of armaments production in the event of war” (xiii).

Even though the Soviet plan for militarization began as early as 1927, after a war scare when the British Government severed diplomatic relations with the USSR (see Arcos raid), the mid-1930's saw the military-economic planning shift away from “abstract threats to real ones,” stemming from the imperialistic intentions of Germany and Japan (Harrison, “Providing for Defense” 87). The Soviet Union had no intentions to undermine its capabilities, shift its heavy poise and relinquish its sense of superiority in order to give way to these rapidly rising powers. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Soviet economy rapidly became an economy of total war preparation. War production was accelerated to a pace that greatly surpassed that of the previous decade, with military-industrial mobilization becoming “all-encompassing, while contingency plans for the future became more and more ambitious” (Harrison 88). Additionally, former defence minister Shlykov reminds us that in order to understand the Soviet mobilization system, “the establishment of the USSR the Bolsheviks never doubted the inevitability of a protracted war with the whole capitalist world.” In 1921 Mikhail Tukhachevskii, the future Soviet Marshal responsible under direct orders from Stalin to put the mobilization program in place, wrote a series of articles, in which he stated:

It is quite impossible to imagine that the world, which has been shaken to its foundations by the World War, could suddenly peacefully divide itself into two

parts - socialism and capitalism - which could live in peace and concord side by side. It is absolutely clear that this time will not come, and that the socialist war will be continuous until one of the sides is victorious. (Tukhachevskii qtd. in Samuleson xii)

If one trusts Shlykov's insight to Stalin's mentality, Stalin would have been fully prepared for the inevitability of conflict with western powers. It is plausible to think that the arms race could have been directed for offensive intentions all along. Shlykov (2000) explains that in order to enable the transition from civilian to military production, "an elaborate and strictly centralized system of mobilization readiness was established at every level of Soviet power and in all the agencies of economic administration, down to the factory level" (Samuelson xii). Compared to the 13 percent increase in the civil sector, the armaments program increased by 39 percent in 1938. Placing emphasis on armor, aeronautics and the development of artillery, the USSR defense committee ordered the construction of nine aircraft production plants and another seven were contracted for the manufacturing of aircraft engines in September of 1939 (Tedor 2002). Supplementing this increase of aircraft production was the fabrication of aviation components that came from a number of converted consumer goods factories. Even "the spirit imbued in the military" was further revised in the 1939 edition of the Red Army's field service regulations – stating that if war were to be “ ‘forced’ on Soviet Russia, ‘We will conduct the war offensively and carry it onto enemy territory’ ” (Tedor 2002).

On June 26, 1940, the Soviet workday was extended from seven to eight hours with a seven days per week schedule. Tedor (2002) maintains that disciplinary action for

“tardiness or slothfulness in the factories was imposed on the work force.” These are normally the kind of measures introduced during wartime. That same year, Soviet production of modern airplanes saw an increase of over 70 percent from the previous year. Likewise, the ground forces also saw a parallel upgrade in weaponry. The Red Army received over 7000 new tanks and 82,000 artillery pieces (including mortars) between January 1939 and June 1941 (Tedor 2002). In addition, the numbers of conscripted soldiers within the Red Army surged. In the spring of 1938, the Red Army forces numbered 1 million men, but by June of 1941, the total rose to 5 million men. The growth of the Red Army in between these years is compared by historian Roger Reese (1996): “There were 198 rifle divisions in 1941, compared to fewer than 30 in 1927; 31 motorized rifle divisions in 1941 and none in 1927; 61 tank divisions in 1941 and none as late as 1939” (35).

On 6 June 1941, Stalin, newly appointed Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, signed a decree “on measures for industry's preparedness to switch to the mobilisation plan for ammunition” (*o meropriiatiakh po podgotovke k perekhodu promyshlennosti na mobilizatsionnyi plan po boepripasam*). The Commissariat had to immediately check all relevant plans, technical designs and stocks of materials at enterprises that were to produce any element for ammunition production (Samuelson 196). By mid-June each Commissariat was to accomplish specified tasks outlined in the enacted decree. The preparedness was supposed to be for “a possible transition of production from 1 July 1941 for work according to the mobilisation plan” (*podgotovit' vse predpriiatiia.....k vozmozhnomu perekhodu s 1 iuliia 1941 g. na rabotu po*

mobilizationnomu planu). Subsequently, Stalin signed other decrees concerning a possible mobilization of industry by 1 July 1941, as well as measures to be taken in the third quarter of 1941, whether war erupted or not (196).

Samuelson (2000) further notes that the Soviet network – from the highest authorities down to the enterprise levels, based its function on 15 years of implementing a dual form of planning: “one plan for current, peacetime production and another plan that estimated the wartime requirements of the military” (196). Certain regional ammunition plants, such as Plant No. 78 in Cheliabinsk, received a corresponding order on its specific mobilization targets by the 16th of June (Samuelson 196). The Cheliabinsk Tractor Factory was one of several hundred great factories that were built at a rapid pace during the first five-year plan (Samuelson 6). Incorporating equipment that had been evacuated from Leningrad, Kharkov and other cities in the east, this former tractor factory started to mass produce heavy tanks. Cooperation with other enterprises in Cheliabinsk, Sverdlovsk (now Ekaterinburg) and Nizhnii Tagil was essential for the mass production of medium and heavy tanks (Samuelson 9). At the start of the war, in the autumn of 1941, the Kirov Works in Leningrad and the diesel engine factory in Kharkov evacuated most of their equipment to Cheliabinsk. Tens of thousands of engineers and workers, along with their families, followed. Thus, the tractor factory changed its name to “The Kirov Works in Cheliabinsk,” and “in the jargon of the day, the city began to be called ‘Tankograd’ ” (9).

Samuelson explains that “the intensive production rate” at this converted tractor factory allowed the Soviet Union to have such a surge in weapons output that despite of its disastrous losses in the initial phase of the war, the Red Army still maintained a

“comparative advantage” (Samuelson 9-10). Consequently, the Wehrmacht was simply unaware that “...the 1941 Red Army was just beginning to field a new generation of tanks (T-34 mediums and KV heavies) were markedly superior to all current and projected German vehicles” (Glantz and House 36).

In 1942 Soviet war production accelerated faster when it was needed; as a result, the Soviet Union outproduced Germany in overall volumes despite an “inferior industrial base” in “both scale and development level” – despite being disadvantaged in restricted variety and reoccurring interruptions in production runs to upgrade weapons. Ultimately, both the industry and the armed forces were committed to a mass production strategy, which, as mentioned, began a decade earlier (Harrison, *Industrial mobilisation for World War II: a German comparison*, 13). Overall, Soviet production outweighed that of Germany in every item except for shipbuilding. Even more remarkable is that Soviet advantage was at its greatest in 1942; just when its struggle against the Wehrmacht for the military advantage was at its peak, the Red Army received combat aircraft at twice the rate of delivery to the enemy, and 3 or 4 times the flow of most other types of ground forces’ armament (Harrison 2). The Soviet Union’s war production was already within 5 percent of its peak in the last quarter of 1942 – 18 months before Germany’s began to peak (2). At this point, the speed with which the Soviet Union’s could arm its ground forces and mobilize them into action, did not allow Germany to keep up. Glantz and House (1998) admit that the German intelligence greatly underestimated “the Soviet ability to reconstitute shattered units and create new forces from scratch...the Red Army's ability to create new divisions as fast as the Germans smashed existing ones was a

principal cause of the German failure in 1941” (67). Prewar German estimates had “postulated an enemy of approximately 300 divisions, (and) by December the Soviets had fielded twice that number” (68). This allowed the Red Army to lose more than 100 divisions in battle and continue the struggle.

A “new acceleration of Soviet war production” was emphasized on 22 June, 1941. Harrison remarks that the first half of the year the monthly output of Soviet war factories had included:

1000 aircraft, 300 tanks, nearly 4000 guns and mortars, and 175,000 rifles. In the second half of the year these rates rose to 3300 aircraft, 800 tanks, 12,000 guns and mortars, and 270,000 rifles per month. More than 10 million shells, mines and bombs were produced on a monthly basis. Even so, this was just the beginning. By the wartime peak in 1944, monthly Soviet output would stand at 3400 aircraft and nearly 1800 armoured fighting vehicles, 11,000 guns and mortars, 200 thousand rifles, and 19 million shells, mines and bombs. (Harrison, “Soviet Planning in Peace and War” 250-1)

Professor Samuelson’s thesis is clear that with regard to industrial mobilization, the Soviet Union was “certainly ahead” of Germany. Adopting the most effective methods and techniques, it prepared the Russian economy and industry for wartime production conditions (Samuelson 196). Compared to Germany it had a superior prewar productive capacity, a more advantageous resource environment, and prewar mobilization plans and procedures (Harrison, “Industrial mobilisation for World War II” 99). As mentioned, early 1930s brought serious mobilization planning to Soviet industry. Industry-wide

mobilization plans were adopted throughout the 1930s, and was reflected in a “ceaseless cascade of lower level mobilization plans and assignments” flowing down the hierarchies ministries to industrial establishments (Harrison 106). When incoming intelligence brought news of progress in mobilization planning being made in Germany, production was further stimulated.

Although we cannot conclude with certainty that this mobilization effort was specifically designed for a preemptive strike on Germany, we can concede that Soviet military strategy consistently favored on directing the offensive; and so, Soviet strategy in the late thirties tailored this mobilization effort specifically toward the challenge of the impending threat of Nazi Germany, and very possibly preparing the launch of its own offensive strike. Concerning this point, Samuelson admits that, “more questions are raised than can be answered...” The alert to the industry and to the entire ‘military-industrial complex’ for preparations to switch once again to wartime production in 1941 (the first time was in autumn 1939, when mobilization plan MP-1 had been introduced during the fourth quarter) does not allow us to confirm that Stalin prepared to launch a war on his own initiative (Samuelson 196). But, the predominant historical narrative, in which Stalin is depicted as “paralysed and disbelieving warnings of an imminent war” (even from his own Intelligence Service), is certainly put to question (Samuelson 196).

It seems, then, that despite the “many lively descriptions” (some of which have been written by the People’s Commissar’s themselves) of Stalin’s refusals to undertake anything that would “provoke” a German attack in 1941, the possibility of a very different narrative arises. The alerts put forth to every People's Commissar and important

directors at both defence industry plants and related civilian enterprises, showcases a different mind-set of Stalin's (Samuleson 196). These series of decrees certainly envisaged a scenario that by 1 July 1941 the Soviet Union might be on a war footing. As research continues to develop, these military-industrial decrees might further forge a link to Stalin's preparations for an offensive – solely on military grounds (196).

Arguably, Germany's offensive in June 1941 came at its most formidable time, and given its long-term preparations for war, the Soviet Union would have grown even stronger, had Germany waited (Hill 73). Samuelson makes an interesting point regarding the cost of the secrecy with which the Soviet Union pursued this program. Orders were given and carried out while questions were not to be asked. Ordinary civilian planners never saw planning documents of which only two or three copies were made. Access to information that clarified purpose and intention was only available to the inner hierarchy that often held informal meetings in Stalin's study.

If the Germans were better informed about the military-economic potential of the Soviet Union, they might have been more reluctant to go ahead with the June 1941 invasion. Colonel-General Halder, himself, dismissed the notion of any offensive actions by the Red Army as “nonsense”, describing Soviet deployment as “rein defensiv” in late June 1941. He was even “skeptical of Hitler's concern about a Soviet thrust towards the Romanian oil fields” (Erickson 2001). Ultimately, the top hierarchy of German leadership thought that the Red Army was in no condition to attack in 1941. Regardless of the truth-value in the former; however, Hitler was misinformed about the scope and size

of Soviet military planning prior to Barbarossa.

CHAPTER 4

NOTES ON THE 1940-41 WAR PLANS (PRECURSORS
TO THE MAY PLAN OF 1941)

Beginning with Shaposhnikov's strategic program of 1938, the most striking of all investigative data supporting the notion of a Soviet preemptive strike on Germany is the documented series of offensive plans that were proposed and implemented by Stalin's generals. At the same time as Hitler in July 1940 was ordering his military commanders to begin making contingency plans for an invasion of the Soviet Union, the Red Army commanders were also making contingency plans for an offensive through the southern part of German-occupied Poland with the objectives of surrounding and destroying the German forces stationed there, and also cutting off German access to its source of oil supply in Romania. The build-up of German forces on the western frontier of the USSR posed a culminating threat. The attack was projected to come to Belarus toward Moscow or a second variant, which stressed the south into the Ukraine as a target, and into Kiev. A revision of July 1940 emphasized the likelihood of a German invasion through the northern route. Stalin and Marshal Timoshenko rejected this variant, which led to yet another revision, in favor of a projected attack on the southwest (Uldricks 635).

Top Soviet commanders held a conference to establish two "war games" in January 1941. The exercises that followed already demonstrated both "the power and the imminence of the German threat", its menace emphasized by Zhukov:

Considering that Germany is currently maintaining its army in a state of mobilization...it has the capacity of beating us to the punch in deployment and of

launching surprise attack. To prevent this, I consider it essential, above all, not to leave the initiative to the German command, but to forestall the enemy in deployment and to attack the German army while it is still in deployment stage. (Uldricks 635)

Under this proposal, the Soviet forces, consisting of 152 divisions and 3-4000 aircraft would launch a surprise attack against the Germans in southern Poland (Mawdsley 820). However, the specific time for implementation is debatable.

The scheduled date for this offensive had not yet been decided at the time the hand-written first draft of the plan was prepared in May 1941 (the time that was indicated in Hitler's December 1940 order to prepare for an invasion of the Soviet Union). The Timoshenko-Zhukov pre-emptive strike plan of May 1941 was a likely reaction to this information – proposing a pre-emptive strike against the German forces massing in Poland. Additionally, Stalin gave the order for the military-industrial complex to be on a full war footing by 1 July. However, this proposal in May did not come out of the blue; it was essentially an update of previous plans for an attack on German-occupied Poland, some of which have been well preserved. The only difference was that, whereas the earlier plans presumed an initial German attack that would be stopped on the border and followed by a massive Red Army counter-attack, the Timoshenko-Zhukov plan proposed a first strike by the Red Army.

With reliance on Professor Evan Mawdsley's thorough analysis, I will conclude that the Timoshenko-Zhukov plan was a real plan intended for implementation. Professor Mawdsley (2003) makes the important point that the pre-emptive strike plan prescribed a

minimum strength for the Red Army forces concentrated in the Lvov salient from which the main thrust of the offensive was to be launched, and that that minimum strength had not been reached as of 22 June. Accordingly, he concludes that the pre-emptive strike being prepared could not have been successfully launched before the German invasion, and probably not for several weeks thereafter. Secondly, through discussion of preceding war plans, I will focus extensively on the September 1940 plan along with a proposal submitted by Timoshenko in October 1940. The analysis of this proposal is crucial to understanding the offensive doctrines of said document and correcting the common view held by many prominent Western historians; namely, that the October 1940 amendment to the September war plan signified proof of a defensive stance, held by the Soviet Union prior to the German attack in June of 1941.

On the whole, Glantz (1998) and Roberts (1995) seem to have convinced most readers that the preliminary war plans were defensive in nature when Mawdsley emphasizes that that was not the case. All plans from the get-go were based on offensive intentions. Evidently, one of the main underlying premises – leading many historians to assume the defensive intentions of the Red Army – is based on an undocumented claim that Soviet historian Dmitri Volkogonov alleges Stalin made about defending Ukraine from the Germans. Mawdsley's work shows us that contrary speculation is equally valid. We can accept Glantz' and others' statements about the strength of the Red Army in 1941 – that they had not reached a level of capability which would allow it to manage an offensive against the German forces in Poland successfully. Despite this agreement with Glantz, Mawdsley makes the distinction between Soviet intentions and their capabilities.

Unlike Western historians' insistence that Soviet capabilities would dictate their intentions, Mawdsley demonstrates that all Soviet war plans from 1940-41 were offensive in nature, and the May 1941 Plan prepared by Timoshenko and Zhukov was known to Stalin – acting as the main foundation for the Red Army's pre-emptive strike preparations from that date onward. However, falling short of its aims, it required a level of strength that was insufficient for the Red Army at the time of June 1941. Noting that the plan did not specify a target date for achieving the necessary level of readiness for launching the proposed first strike, Mawdsley considers that the May Plan need not have been designed for an immediate pre-emptive strike in the summer of 1941, but rather for implementation at some future date (likely in 1942) when the prescribed strength level of the Red Army had been reached. This would obviously be ideal. However, when it became clear that a German attack was imminent in June of 1941, a preemptive strike on Germany in the summer of 1941 became a viable option and a clear possibility. After Stalin accepted Timoshenko's and Zhukov's plan, he ordered the preparations to be made for putting it into action, initializing the mobilization process, but the German attack came first.

CHAPTER 5

THE WAR PLANS OF AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1940

In May of 1940, after the poor performance of the Red Army in the Soviet-Finnish conflict, defense minister Marshal K.E. Voroshilov was replaced by Semyon Timoshenko. In the “extraordinary document” that Mawdsley draws from the Russian archives, available in 1998, it was noted that when Timoshenko took charge of the people’s commissariat of defense, “there was no operational war plan and that neither general nor partial operational plans existed or were under development” (Timoshenko qtd. in Mawdsley 820). However, despite the weight of the events transpiring in Poland and France, the Soviet annexations and the Soviet-Finnish War, a war plan had been produced in March 1938 by Army Commander of the First Class, B.M. Shaposhnikov, then chief of the general staff and approved by the military council that November (Mawdsley 821). Despite the plan’s basing itself on a different situation from that of late 1940-41, with old borders in place (assuming a German-Polish alliance), the conceptual framework was identical to all the later war plans: a Red Army would launch an offensive (or counter offensive) either north or south of the Poles’ia (the Pripiat marshes) and then, “after a mass mobilization, the Soviet forces would carry the war into the enemy’s territory” (821).

In August 1940, immediately after the Baltic States were annexed, Timoshenko and Shaposhnikov submitted a draft war plan, “Considerations (Soobrazheniia) Regarding the Basis of the Strategic Deployment of the Armed Forces of the USSR in the West and in the East in 1940 and 1941”, to Stalin and Molotov, the Soviet prime minister. There

was only one copy of the document; the final draft composed by Major General A.M. Vasilevskii, who had just become deputy chief of the operations directorate of the general staff. Similar to prior proposals, this plan gave the Red Army an offensive mission (Mawdsley 821). This offensive would come from the northern half of the front (north of the Poles'ia), where it was now thought the first German attack would appear: "The basic task of our forces is 'to inflict defeat on the German forces concentrated in East Prussia and the Warsaw area' " (821).

Consequently, the political leadership did not approve the plan, and Shaposhnikov was subsequently replaced as chief of the general staff by General of the army, K.A. Meretskoy. Timoshenko and Meretskoy then submitted a revised war plan, containing the same title and structure as its predecessor, in September 1940, which again was written up by Vasilevskii. Like 1938 and August 1940 plans, northern and southern variants for operations in the West were included; however, following a discussion with Stalin on 5 October, Timoshenko and Meretskoy proposed that the southern variant was to be the "main blow." The proposal was accepted in the name of the politburo on 14 October 1940 (Mawdsley 821).

Leading Western scholar of Soviet Military History in WWII, David Glantz (1998), has argued that the possibility of the Red Army being used offensively was unthinkable, as the "Soviet and military leadership...understood that the Soviet military colossus was severely flawed" (Glantz 259). Glantz has discussed the war plans of August and September 1940, including the October politburo decision, in detail, often stressing the change of the Red Army's position from Belorussia to the Ukraine to

coincide with defensive strategy that they believed that the Soviet Administration was focused on (Mawdsley 822). Ultimately, these defensive considerations miss the point made in October 1940 concerning the September war plan. The Kremlin's decision was not about the involvement of the Red Army in defensive operations in Belorussia (north of the Poles'ia) or the Ukraine (south of the Poles'ia). Instead, it emphasized the fighting strategy of the Red Army as an offensive operation against Germany in "either north or south of Brest-Litovsk" – attacking into East Prussia and northern Poland or into southern Poland (Mawdsley 822).

CHAPTER 6

THE OCTOBER 1940 REVISION

Countering Glantz, Mawdsley argues that from the point of view of a Soviet defender, “the northern axis, with an attacker moving from East Prussia and northern Poland into Belorussia was the greater threat to Moscow.” In particular, behind the invader's border were better lines of communication, allowing for faster concentration of forces; within the Soviet Union there were better rail and road infrastructure that an invader would look to exploit (Mawdsley 822). The northern sector was, in fact, where the Germans actually chose to mount their main attack in June 1941. If the Red Army were to be a “passive buffer” against such an attack, the proper place to concentrate it would be Belorussia – not the Ukraine (south of the Poles’ia) (822).

From the point of view of a “Soviet attacker” however, deployment in Belorussia would be less advantageous. A northern attack would be against East Prussia and Northern Poland, and the former region presented special difficulties, as was noted in the September plan:

1. The strong resistance, with the [inevitable] introduction of significant [German] reinforcements...
2. The difficult natural conditions of East Prussia, which present extreme difficulties in the conduct of offensive operations.
3. The exceptionally well-prepared nature of this theatre for defence, especially the fortifications and [dense] road network.

In conclusion there is a danger that the struggle on this front would lead to long drawn-out battles which would tie down our main forces and not give the necessary rapid result,

which in turn would make unavoidable and more rapid the entry of the Balkan states into the war against us (Strategic Deployment Plan, Sept. 1940, cited in Mawdsley 823).

After the adoption of the Southern variant, these points would again be mentioned in the March 1941 War Plan. Historically, Russian armies had experienced “great difficulties” in the forest regions of East Prussia in 1914-15 along with the frustration of trying to break the defenses of the Mannerheim Line in 1939-40. Mawdsley affirms that the Soviet planners, Timoshenko and Meretskov, could not have ignored these experiences as veterans of the Finnish campaign (823). Overall, to have the Red Army attack out of the Ukraine, moving into southern Poland, was a “much softer objective” than East Prussia – in terms of terrain and prepared defences. Such an attack from the south offered the possibility of “outflanking and encircling” the German forces concentrated in central Poland (823). Moreover, the Germans’ link with their resource base in the Balkans allowed for the Southern variant to have better strategic value. This way, the Red Army was to deploy:

to the south of Brest-Litovsk in order, by means of powerful blows in the directions of Lublin and Krakow [in southern Poland] and further to Breslau [in Silesia, now Wroclaw], to cut Germany off from the Balkan countries in the very first stage of the war, to deprive it of its most important economic bases, and decisively to influence the Balkan countries in the question of their participation in the war.” (Strategic Deployment Plan, Sept. 1940, cited in Mawdsley 823)

Ultimately, Mawdsley notes that the major flaw of the September 1940 plan and its successors was the “greatly exaggerated estimate of German strength,” on which the Red Army Intelligence based its planning right up to June 1941 (823). A figure of 243 divisions was the total estimated strength of the German army in the September 1940 plan. Of this figure, Red Army intelligence placed “up to” 94 on the Soviet border. If such an assessment were accurate, it would indicate a “great build-up” since mid-July 1940 (Mawdsley 824). It would follow then, that only thirteen divisions would be estimated to be in East Prussia and up to twenty-eight in Poland. Mawdsley indicates that the Soviet plan was based “on a war to be fought some time in the future (although not necessarily after the end of the German war with Britain), when the Germans had been able “to increase their strength in the East to 173 out of 243 divisions” (824).

However, the reality was quite different. The German army only had a total of 140 combat-ready divisions in December 1940. Thirty-six of those faced Russia (including the two located in Romania). Moreover, the twenty-six German divisions were in the process of formation and eighteen were “on leave” – *beurlaubt*. Even less accurate were Soviet estimates of Luftwaffe strength; in September, this was put at 14,200-15,000 aircraft (including 2800-3300 trainers), and both the August and September plans had anticipated that 12,000 German aircraft would be placed in the East. But in mid-August 1940, the Luftwaffe’s force only totaled at 3157 serviceable aircraft in front-line units (including 226 transports), “roughly a quarter of the Soviet estimate” (Mawdsley 824).

In their work, both Cynthia Roberts (1995) and David Glantz (1998) cite an “extended verbatim comment” that Stalin made on 5 October 1940 about the September

plan. In this comment, Stalin supposedly “expressed fear of a German invasion of the Ukraine” (Mawdsley 824). Mawdsley traces back their source to a sole “undocumented” passage in D. A. Volkogonov's biography of Stalin. Evidently, this is not convincing proof that “the choice of the southern option was really based on fear of a German invasion of the Ukraine” (824). Consequently, one of the main underlying premises – leading many historians to assume the defensive intentions of the Red Army – is based on an undocumented claim that Volkogonov alleges Stalin made. The September 1940 plan assumed that the main German attack would be against Lithuania and Belorussia, with suggestions that a secondary offensive might be launched on western Ukraine. Timoshenko and Meretskov's proposal in October 1940 to concentrate the Red Army in the south would have been made after Stalin's supposed comment on October 5; in light of this, Mawdsley writes, “it is noteworthy that the proposal does not refer to any specific threat to the Ukraine” (Mawdsley 824).

Like the original September 1940 plan, the October revision follows its exact wording, entirely in offensive terms:

In the West, the basic grouping is to be in the Southwestern Front in order, by means of powerful blows in the directions of Lublin and Krakow and further to Breslau, to cut Germany off from the Balkan countries in the very first stage of the war, to deprive it of its most important economic bases, and decisively to influence the Balkan countries in the question of their participation in the war.

(Timoshenko and Meretskov, memo to Stalin and Molotov, no earlier than 5 Oct. 1940, Cf. the text in Strategic Deployment Plan, cited in Mawdsley 825)

Furthermore, the Soviet plan of 1940 involved of 191 Red Army divisions and 159 aviation regiments to be deployed in the West (there were about forty aircraft in a regiment). Three Army Groups were to be created. The Northwestern and Western Army Groups, comprising five field armies, would hold off any German attack in the northern sector of the front. The main Soviet offensive blow, however, was to be delivered by seven field armies to the south. The Southwestern Army Group would provide six of these armies (based on the Kiev MD, commanded at this time by General of the Army G. K. Zhukov), while an additional army group would come from the neighbouring Western Army Group. Included in the Southwestern Army Group, was a “Cavalry-Mechanized Army” (*Konno mekhanizirovannaia armiia*) with four tank, two motorized, and two cavalry divisions concentrated at Lvov in the western Ukraine. An additional mechanized corps would concentrate behind it at Tarnopol (Mawdsley 825).

In January 1941, this strategic concept was tested at the general staff war games. Mawdsley explains that when originally organized, only one war game took place – concentrating in the northwest (Lithuania and East Prussia). After the October 14 politburo decision to shift the Red Army attack to the south, a second game was added to recreate operations by the Southwestern Army Group. These games were “based on the assumption that war had been initiated by a hostile power (the ‘Westerners’) and not by the Soviet Union” (825).

CHAPTER 7

MP-41 AND THE MAY PLAN 1941

By May 1941, Marshall Zhukov had been at his new post as Chief of General Staff for about 12 weeks. In many ways, his appointment was a further “offensive endorsement” of the Red Army (Mawdsley 827). As commander of the Kiev MD since June 1940, “Zhukov had become familiar with the forces that would carry out the thrust into southern Poland. He had given the keynote address on offensive warfare at the December 1940 high command conference” (827).

As Zhukov took up his post, “the finishing touches” to yet another plan were prepared: this time, general mobilization, not operational deployment, was at issue. The plan, entitled, MP-41 (*Mobilizatsionnyi plan na 1941 god*), was sent to Molotov and Stalin in mid-February 1941, and apparently approved. Evidently, MP-41 had been in the works by the organization-mobilization directorate of the general staff since August-September 1940. Replacing the previous mobilization plan of November 1937, the new plan outlined the wartime strength of the Red Army and the men, horses, and equipment that would be required to achieve that. Mawdsley notes that “there were to be 8,700,000 soldiers in the equivalent of just over 300 fully-equipped divisions.” This total would include at least sixty tank divisions and thirty motorized divisions. The Red Army air force was to have 333 aviation regiments (13,000-14,000 aircraft). The aircraft figures were also unrealistic in terms of 1941 production.

Mawdsley affirms that, in general, MP-41 was largely “symptomatic of grave weakness in the Soviet military the plan” as the objectives were founded on “overly optimistic long-term targets of the defence industry” than on what would be required or even practically realizable for the near future. Designed to “please their political masters”, the generals neither had the authority nor experience to “argue that particular objectives were unrealistic” (827). The obtainment of the plan’s equipment was planned up to 1 January 1942. The number of heavy and medium tanks, for example, was to rise from 861 on 1 January 1941 to 4261 by 1 January 1942. Despite the might of the Soviet Military-Industrial Complex, there would be vehicle insufficiencies to keep sixty tank divisions and thirty motorized divisions consistently in place. This was the case for the whole course of 1941, as well as 1942 and as late as 1943. MP-41’s assumptions and miscalculations were reflective of the 1930s Stalinist system as a whole, with its “exhortative planning, its ‘gigantomania’, and its wishful thinking” (Mawdsley 828).

Undoubtedly, the overestimated projections of MP-41 affected the March plan (and ultimately, contributing to the Red Army’s disarray at the start of the war), which prepared for wartime preparations at some point in the near future. German strength (as assessed by the general staff) had not yet reached levels given in the plan; moreover, the planners included Soviet forces that did not yet exist (Mawdsley 832). The Red Army did not have forty-five tank divisions, and following the ambitions of MP-41, the national total of 333 aviation regiments was projected “extremely optimistically” for 1 January 1942 (832). On the other hand, an annotation by Vatutin (Zhukov’s Deputy) suggests that despite the limited forces available, some thought was given to an attack. Gor’kov

(without referring to the Vatutin annotation) entertains the idea that Stalin did not approve the March war plan, but no clear evidence confirms this. After all, the document was addressed: “Central committee of the VKP(b), com. Stalin, com. Molotov”, so it was likely sent to them. Mawdsley indicates that Timoshenko and Zhukov had meetings with Stalin at his Kremlin office on the evenings of 17 March (for 5 hours and 35 minutes) and 18 March (2 hours and 5 minutes). Furthermore, Stalin's practice was “to give only verbal approval to such documents”, so the fact that the March war plan bears no signature, is not indicative of disapproval (832).

CHAPTER 8

THE WAR PLAN OF MAY 1941

Several significant events followed the two months between the completion of the March war plan and its successor in the middle of May. Further reports of Hitler's intention to attack the Soviet Union made their way to the Kremlin, while observing continuous movement of German troops to the Soviet border. Mawdsley affirms that “it is hard to tell how far the measures taken were responses to this intelligence, to the fulfillment of the September 1940 and March 1941 offensive war plans, or to the implementation of the ‘hidden’ aspects of MP-41” (Mawdsley 832). It is possible that all measures discussed herein were influenced by these reports.

From February 1941, three army group (front) headquarters began to form on the basis of the existing MDs; the Baltic, Western, and Kiev MDs, became the Northwestern, Western, and Southwestern Army Groups. Following a politburo decision of 8 March 1941, over 900,000 reservists were called up at various times between 15 May and 20 October 1941 to train with under-strength divisions. Meltyukhov (2000) writes that between 25 March and 5 April 1941, 394,000 twenty-year-olds were called up in secret to prepare for more offensively directed operations. In April 1941, five airborne corps were established, 20,000 parachutes were ordered and a design for troop-carrying gliders was scheduled. (Meltyukhov 330, 362-3); (Mawdsley 833). Moreover, Zhukov pushed Stalin to implement the decision to “establish further large armoured formations in the shape of fifteen mechanized corps.” (Some nine mechanized corps had been ordered set up after

the Fall of France in July 1940; another twenty began formation in February 1941) (Mawdsley 833).

On Tuesday, 13 May, four armies of the high command reserve were ordered to “begin movement from the interior to the Western and Kiev MDs.” On Wednesday, 14 May, the western border MDs were ordered to “prepare plans for ‘covering zones’ ”. Mawdsley notes that the May war plan proposal was probably completed on the following day, Thursday, 15 May (Mawdsley 834). The document is divided into two parts: an outlining war plan (Sections I- VIII), and five specific requests that Timoshenko and Zhukov put forth to Stalin (Section IX). The first part outlined the deployment of the Red Army and a “plan of ‘intended military actions’ ” (Strategic Deployment Plan, May 1941, cited in Mawdsley 834).

While first request sought confirmation of the proposed deployment of the army and of the plan of intended military actions, the second focused on approving the “ ‘timely’ hidden mobilization and hidden concentration of forces, in the first instance of the high command reserve armies and of the air force” (Mawdsley 834). Directly relating to the deployment plan, these two requests were further elaborated (Section IV), listing important measures requiring immediate completion:

- (a) hidden mobilization under the cover of training manoeuvres;
- (b) secret concentration of forces close to the frontier under cover of training camps (in the first instance of the high command reserve armies); (c) hidden concentration of the air force on forward airfields; and (d) gradual deployment of the rear echelon.

(Mawdsley 834)

The third request (in Section IX) called for completion of railway construction; the fourth, confirmation that required tanks, aircraft, munitions, and fuel would be supplied by industry, while the fifth (a late addition), sought an approved proposal for construction of new fortified regions. Neither the plan of intended military actions nor the requests were “new”, in the sense that they proposed radical ideas that went against prior arrangements. When D.A. Volkogonov first revealed the existence of the May Plan in his biography of Stalin in 1989, only two printed paragraphs from the document were revealed – not clarifying that they came from the middle of a much longer document. Mawdsley points out that the citing of this short passage, gives a “radical” connotation to this proposal, sounding like “an informal initiative by an overly decisive Zhukov,” when the fifteen-page manuscript was actually similar to the war plans of September 1940 and March 1941. The general theme – calling for “considerations on the plan for the strategic deployment of the Armed Forces of the USSR ...” – remained; however, this time, it was “... in the event of war with Germany and her allies” instead of “... in the West and in the East in 1940 and 1941” (as in the September 1940 and March 1941 plans). The full version of the plan contained the same general structure as the previous ones, describing the “strength and intentions of the enemy, along with a statement of Soviet strategic objectives, a proposed allocation of Soviet forces to various sectors” (Mawdsley 834).

Evidently, preparation for war was ongoing well before the German attack on the Soviet Union, with several plans implemented to lead up to the May 1941 Plan. The “plan of ‘intended military actions’ ” evident in the final plan in May was “the same as

what Stalin had first seen in September 1940, approved in October 1940, and considered again in March 1941.” The first strategic objective of the forces of the Red Army in the May plan was as follows:

the destruction of the main forces of the German Army which are deployed south of Deblin and the arrival by the 30th day of the operation at the line Ostrolka, Narew River, Lowicz, Lodz, Kluczbork, Opole, Olomouc. The subsequent strategic objective is: an offensive from the region of Katowice in a northern or north-western direction to destroy the main forces of the centre and northern wing of the German Front and to conquer the territory of former Poland and East Prussia. (Strategic Deployment Plan, May 1941, cited in Mawdsley 835)

The main strength of the Red Army was involved in this proposed offensive. It was assumed that the Red Army would have “local superiority”, totaling 152 divisions versus 100 German ones. Like the plans before it, the May plan referred to conquering Poland and East Prussia (836). This advance, as evident in the September and March plans, entailed most of southern Poland. The “great left hook of the Red Army” would still be made of the Southwestern Army Group. The right flank armies of the Army Group “were ‘to surround and destroy the main grouping of the enemy east of the Vistula in the Lublin area.’ ” At the same time, “Southwestern Army Group was ‘to smash [razbif] the forces of the enemy in the Sandomierz-Kielce direction and to conquer [ovladet] the Krakow, Katowice, and Kielce districts’ ” (835). The May plan contemplated a surprise attack by

the Red Army – a “ ‘sudden blow [vnezapnyi udar] against the enemy, both from the air and on land’, following a ‘hidden mobilization’ ” (836).

On page 840 of his paper, Mawdsley (2003) provides a table outlining the divisions required under the May 1941 War Plan, and what was available on 14 May under the Covering Plans sent to Military District Commanders, as well as availability in mid-June 1941 – according to Vatutin's Report on Deployment of 13 June (840). According to that data, The Southwestern Front, which was to spearhead the proposed pre-emptive strike, had the following number of divisions assigned and available:

Required for May Plan.....122

Available 14 May under Covering Plans.....67

Available mid-June according to Vatutin's report.....77

According to Mawdsley, 97 divisions were also reported in Vatutin's report of 13 June; however, 20 of those were resting rifle divisions in the Volga, Khar'kov and Orel Military Districts; and in mid-June, they were not in place on the frontier (840). Hence, Mawdsley excluded them from his analysis. Thus, if we compare the total numbers specified in the May Plan, the Red Army was still short of 45 divisions in mid-June. Mawdsley, therefore, doubts that a pre-emptive strike launched by the Red Army before 22 June could have been successful. However, a breakdown of total divisions available for the Southwest Front, as evidenced in the May Plan, obscures that assumption:

Division type:.....May Plan.....Available 13 June

Tank.....28.....20

Motorised.....	15.....	10
Rifle.....	74.....	43
Cavalry.....	5.....	4

Here, the deficiency lies in 8 tank divisions (30%), 5 motorised divisions (33%), 31 rifle divisions (42%), and one cavalry division (20%). The shortage is definitely less in the tank and motorized divisions than in the rifle divisions, indicating that the lead offensive of the Southwest Front might have had more potency than first appears to be the case.

If the Red Army had launched a first strike on June 12th with what it had available that day (which Meltyukhov believes it was actually planning to do), the Soviet armoured and motorized forces would have outnumbered the positioned units of the Wehrmacht. Taking into account that the German armoured formations – spearheading the invasion of the Soviet Union – only settled into their jump-off positions several days before 22 June (and some not even until after the start of the invasion), it is possible that the Red Army could have achieved a breakthrough on the Southwest Front – a central feature of the May Plan.

Again, we must make clear distinctions between Soviet intentions and Soviet capabilities. It is possible that the Soviet leadership's intention to launch a first strike against the German forces could co-exist with the evident deficiencies in its military capacity at the time, omitting such a strike from any guarantee of success. In such a situation, Stalin could have made a gamble and initiated a first strike on German forces before the numbers provided in the May Plan had been reached, or he could have waited until all forces had been fully assembled – prolonging the Soviet first strike until 1942 at the earliest, with the imminent danger that Germany would strike first in the meanwhile.

Although Mawdsley does not believe that the Red Army could have launched a successful first strike before the Germans on 22 June, he does firmly state that Stalin had offensive intentions, and that he was neither following a passive course of waiting, nor a defensive course of strategy. Depending on what Stalin's intentions actually were, Mawdsley believes that there are three possible ways of implementing the May Plan for a first strike: First, immediate implementation in mid-May, which given the time allowed for full mobilization of the forces provided for in the plan, would mean that the Soviet strike could not be launched until late July. Second, through delayed implementation: meaning that the Soviet strike would be launched later in the year. Finally, we could consider the postponement of implementation until 1942, which would allow for a full build-up of the strength assumed in the plan (Mawdsley 837-838).

Mawdsley entertains the idea Timoshenko and Zhukov preferred to implement the plan as soon as possible, relying on the forces available at the time, but Stalin held them back for fear that a first strike would not succeed, and that a prior Soviet mobilization would trigger an immediate German response (Mawdsley 862-863). The fact that no Soviet strike occurred before the German invasion of 22 June may point to Stalin's decision to gamble with time: delaying a Soviet offensive until the conditions of the May Plan were fulfilled; in all likelihood, no earlier than 1942. To the contrary, this could also mean that Stalin decided to immediately implement the preliminary stages of the May Plan in order to be ready for a full-scale attack in late July or August. Evidence of the continued movement west of the high command reserve armies (initiated on 13 May) supports this claim. The "desiderata" of the 15 May war plan were in the process of being

fulfilled, a process which already began before the May plan was drafted, and which continued in late May. The Red Army was taking important measures in the “critical days” between 5 and 15 May. Of course, these measures “must have had Stalin’s approval” (Mawdsley 851).

It is important to mention that the May plan was drafted soon after Stalin’s speeches in the Kremlin on 5 May to the graduates of various Red Army academies, an event which the military and political leadership of the Soviet Union attended. Soviet Historian Anfiflov’s recollection of his interview with Zhukov, confirms Zhukov’s importance of Stalin’s speeches:

The idea to pre-empt the German attack came to Timoshenko and me in connection with Stalin's speech of 5 May 1941 ... in which he spoke of the possibility of an offensive mode of action [o vozmozhnost deistvovat nastupatevnyim obrazom]. This speech, in the circumstances of the enemy concentration of forces on our borders, convinced us of the need to work out a directive involving a pre-emptive attack. (Mawdsley 849)

Without getting into extensive details, Stalin’s main speech of 5 May concerned the Red Army’ strength and the need not to “overrate the German armed forces.” He also pointed out that the French defeat in 1940 came as a result of their “passive Maginot Line strategy” (Mawdsley 849). Furthermore, Mawdsley notes that “Stalin did indeed refer to the doctrine of the offensive in his speeches of 5 May (the full details of which were not made public at that time, and not even until the 1990s) (Mawdsley 849).

Stalin remained, “in close contact with the high command.” Stalin and Molotov

spent two hours alone with Timoshenko and Zhukov on the evening of 10 May, and the two officers also met Stalin for ninety minutes on the 12th, and again for two hours on 14-15 May (after the main military council). Significant to mention, is the fact that on the midnight meeting of May 14-15, one other official, none other than Lazar' Kaganovich, politburo member and people's commissar for transport (NKPS) also attended (Mawdsley 851). This should be seen with regard to the third request in the May war plan (completed on the following day): “ ‘to demand of the NKPS the full and timely completion of railway construction according to the plan for 1941.’” On May 13th, the general staff ordered the repositioning of four armies (16th, 19th, 21st, and 22nd Armies) from the interior to Western and Kiev Military Districts. Their strength totaled twenty-eight rifle divisions – consisting of the high command reserve – also featured in the May war plan (“to carry out a hidden concentration of forces nearer to the western frontier, in the first instance to concentrate all armies of the high command reserve”) (Mawdsley 851). Furthermore, 16th and 19th Armies were intended for the Southwestern Army Group, and 22nd Army for Western Army Group; 21st Army was already listed as attached to the Kiev MD.

Also, soon after May 5th, Timoshenko and Zhukov were allowed to order for “covering plans” to be prepared by the frontier MDs. These covering plans were to be ready within a week or two (depending on the MD), and Mawdsley notes, that “the most likely date for sending these orders out was, significantly, 14 May.” So, even though the preparation of the covering plans can be seen as a reaction to the German troop build-up, the “bolstering the border defences was an essential first stage in the implementation of

an offensive war plan” (Mawdsley 851). The mobilization and deployment of the main Red Army striking force had to be covered, and it was also necessary to prepare those sectors of the front – the future Northwestern and Western Army Groups – that would be on the defensive as the attack of Southwestern Army Group began. The May war plan would request precisely this preliminary step: “to organize a ‘firm defence and a covering of the state border, using for this all forces of the border [military] districts and nearly all aviation which has been assigned for deployment in the West.’” These plans were to be drawn up by 1 June (851).

On May 24, a large and important meeting took place between Stalin and senior military leaders. Unfortunately, no detailed records have yet been produced. It is known, however, that Timoshenko, Zhukov, Vatutin, the head of the air force, the commanders and commissars of the Leningrad MD and the four border MDs, and the commanders of the air forces of the Western and Kiev MDs were all present. Mawdsley emphasizes that there was “no comparable meeting, combining the central and field military leaders, at any other date in the first half of 1941” (854). Striking too is the fact that this meeting has never been discussed by Russian military historians, remaining “one of the major mysteries of the pre-Barbarossa period” (Mawdsley 854). Ultimately, Soviet forces partially mobilized and had begun to concentrate along the frontier. When the Germans attacked, the Red Army was caught on the frontier – in the process of deploying for an offensive.

CHAPTER 9

The Aftermath

As far back as December 1940, reports warned the Soviet Union of the possible German invasion in the spring of 1941. The build-up of German troops along the Soviet border was also cause for alarm. Presumably, the fulfillment of the September 1940 and March 1941 offensive war plans, along with Stalin's agreement with Yugoslavia in 1941 (as discussed in Ch.1), were seen as a counter to these threats. The pace of production in the military-industrial complex was accelerated, but Soviet leadership remained confident that a German offensive would not come in the summer of 1941; The May plan of 1941 simply did not anticipate the German attack in June of 1941. It was not until the beginning of May when reliable reports with specific information began to pour out from foreign intelligence sources, suggesting dates for the coming invasion: On May 5, 1941, Soviet intelligence officer, Richard Sorge, passed a microfilm of a telegram from Ribbentrop to Ott, German ambassador to Tokyo, that stated, "Germany will begin a war against the USSR in the middle of June 1941." AVS reports: "The date for German military operations against the USSR was to have been May 15 . . . it has now been moved back to the middle of June." AVS learns from his source Gerstenberg that the "month of June would see the beginning of the war" (Murphy 2005). Despite of these reports, however, a major reason for Soviet misjudgment was the German success in concealing their state of readiness. For instance, German armoured formations that were to spearhead the invasion did not arrive until a couple of days before the scheduled start-

date. Even then, the Soviet general staff failed to judge German army's ability to launch an offensive upon arriving on the frontier. Shaposhnikov "had estimated 10 to 15 days", but the German armored and motorized divisions, "struck with full fury," right after reaching the border (Tedor 2002). At this time, the Soviet command could not change their strategic plan. In some vulnerable areas, for example in Lithuania, the Red Army began to withdraw on 21 June, but by then it was too late to re-deploy from an offensive into a defensive position. The dilemma is further illuminated by Walter Post:

A strategic defense would have required a total revision of the troop disposition, which because of the poor rail network could not be carried out in a short time.... The Soviet command had at this late hour no other choice but to maintain poise, camouflage its own deploying of forces as much as possible and hope for enough time to complete the concentration of its troops and attack according to plan. (Tedor 2002)

While the preliminary stages of the May Plan were initiated, Stalin did his best to delay the German assault: accelerating the production of the Soviet military-industrial complex, and the preparations of the Red Army. Now, time was running out and the Soviet forces were in the process of massing on the frontier, following the procedure laid down in the first stages of the Timoshenko- Zhukov plan, while the frantic military build-up continued. Units were "receiving new ordinance, recruit training was under way, many formations were under-strength. Other divisions were still en route by rail" (Tedor 2002). The captive Gen. Andrei Vlasov's remarks on the subject in 1942 were summarized by a German intelligence officer:

The Soviets had been forming up since the beginning of the year, which, due to the bad Soviet railroad lines, went rather slowly. Hitler judged the situation perfectly and plowed right into the Soviets while they were deploying. This is how Vlasov explains the Germans' enormous initial success.

(Michaels 1999)

As Mawdsley points out, the forces located in the Lvov salient that were to lead the pre-emptive strike, had not reached the required level of strength specified in the plan as of 22 June. This suggests that a specific target date had not yet been set, or if it had, it was some time later, perhaps the August/September time-frame mentioned by many captured Red Army officers. If Stalin had planned to launch a strike against German-occupied Poland in August/September, as many Red Army officers believed, then it was only to be expected that many Red Army units would still be moving toward the frontier as of 22 June.

These offensive intentions of the Soviet Union were largely responsible for its scramble to sustain itself at the beginning of the war. The effect of the offensive deployment of the Red army, as opposed to a defensive deployment, meant “deploying forces and supplies as far to the west as possible: mechanised units, airfields, and supply bases had to be situated in forward locations, able to be used in an attack, but also highly vulnerable to an enemy first strike” leading to the unfortunate consequence of deploying the largest part of the Red Army in Ukraine, “poised to attack southern Poland, rather than in Belorussia” (Mawdsley 862-863).

Despite all of this, the notion that the Red Army would have benefitted

from launching an attack first is not so far-fetched. What made the Red Army so susceptible to a German first strike – as Mawdsley points out: its offensive deployment close to the border – applied equally to the German army, also deployed in an offensive position on the border. The German Army, not being in a defensive position, was just as susceptible to a first strike as was the Red Army, the very basis of Timoshenko and Zhukov's reasoning in the May Plan. The occurrence of a Soviet first strike in June of 1941 might not have been as efficient and devastating as the German first strike, but it could have been better than trying to recover from a German offensive.

Along with the added task of first stopping the advancing German forces, Red Army commanders were now trying to implement the existing Timoshenko-Zhukov first-strike plan. It would be a more viable objective if the Red Army had struck first and caught the Germans in non-offensive deployment. Now that Hitler's forces took the initiative, Soviet forces struggled to adapt their offensive plans to suit the undergoing attack.

CHAPTER 10

Conclusion

At the meetings with British and French military representatives in Moscow in August of 1939, Stalin's representatives were proposing to send 100 Red Army divisions against Nazi Germany. Until that time period, most historians agree that Stalin left open the notion of joining France and Britain.

However at the end of 1939, it is also now known that the British Prime Minister and French President were not interested in this alliance. Similarly, Stalin thought it was now of most benefit to the Soviets to sign the Molotov-Ribbentrop treaty. This way they would be ready to gather the resulting spoils, after the aforementioned countries emerged from war with Nazi Germany. Research hints at Stalin's ambitions to spread communist influence across Europe, extend Soviet borders, and take advantage of a war that had the potential to leave Europe incapacitated.

Evidently, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact would not last for very long. Stalin's calculations stalled as he witnessed the swift German attack on Poland, and the quick victories Hitler's military had gained up to 1940. Rather than having the Red Army try to take what would remain of a devastated Europe, Stalin realized that a battle with the full-fledged force of Germany was inevitable. What followed were Stalin's further attempts to upgrade the Red Army for a preemptive war with Germany. Ultimately, the need for a Soviet offensive came earlier than originally hoped for and Soviet forces were unable to get mobilize themselves in time.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union's failure to renegotiate the Hitler/Stalin Pact in November 1940, along with its reduction of resources to Germany in the summer of 1940, confirmed its unwilling status to ever join the war against Britain. Hitler knew that Stalin would never become an ally. At some point in the future, when German strength wore down, the Soviet Union might even join Britain's fight against them. Underestimating Soviet military capabilities, Hitler then thought it more advantageous to attack the Soviet Union while German military power was still at its peak. It is plausible to think that German attack would have come even sooner, but the Soviet agreement with the Yugoslavian government stalled the German strike. Despite it failing to buy Stalin enough time for to strike first, it was still a successful move. Operation Barbarossa was delayed by several weeks; thereby, shortening the critical timespan for the initiation of the German campaign. Despite the heavy damage inflicted during the first few months of the war, the Red Army recovered and Germany quickly realized the extent of Soviet prewar preparations.

Unlike Evan Mawdsley, Professor Samuelson does not deal with tactical planning or strategy, but with the economic preparations undergone in the Soviet Union, supposedly for war. Samuelson shows us that by 1941 the Soviet Union had built its military industry, and by 1942, its sheer numbers were capable of defeating the forces of Germany. Samuelson also makes it clear that in the months leading up to the German invasion, Stalin, was far from being incapacitated with fear. Instead, the Soviet administration were busily making preparations for war, as shown by the preparation order of a pre-emptive strike plan by Timoshenko and Zhukov in May 1941, along with

the order to the Soviet military industry for “full war footing” by 1 July of that year, and ready to fully implement the mobilization plan.

Samuelson writes that the German point of view was simply based on a “severe underestimation” of Soviet production capacities. Instead of being showcased as a safeguard for the nation, “the extreme secretiveness surrounding the Soviet military-industrial complex, and particularly its mobilization capacities, from the early 1930s produced an image of a ramshackle economy” (Samuelson 198-199). Ironically, the Soviet administration overestimated the strength of the German forces on which the Red Army Intelligence based its planning right up to June 1941. If only the Soviet planners had a more accurate representation of German military capacity, perhaps a preemptive Soviet strike would have been imminent. Likewise, if Hitler had a more extensive picture of the strength of the Soviet industrial-military complex, it would have shown Germany what they most feared: a Soviet military force growing steadily in strength, was only an arm’s length away, ready to emerge in the near future. Whether such knowledge would have deterred Hitler from invading the Soviet Union and adopting an alternative strategy, remains unknown. What remains clear, however, is the open possibility that Stalin was preparing to launch his own war. Stalin’s own decrees imply this, along with the offensive plans of 1940 and 1941, which have lead to misconceptions by western historians. In particular, the cause for misinterpretation arises in the 1940 September war plan, which involves a revision in October 1940 (Timoshenko and Meretskov’s proposal to concentrate the Red Army in the south), which western historians have incorrectly

interpreted as defensive posturing. As elaborated by Professor Mawdsley, the move directly related to a continuous offensive strategy.

Finally, the 1940-41 offensive plans culminated in the pre-emptive strike plan developed by Timoshenko and Zhukov in May 1941. The May plan intended for the launching of pre-emptive strike against the German forces massing in occupied Poland. Just like the 1940-41 plans before it, the 1941 May Plan based itself on the concept of a massive offensive from the Lvov salient pushing through southern Poland as far as the southern part of Silesia, and then turning northward to advance to the Baltic Sea. This would allow the Red Army to cut off and encircle the greater part of the German armed forces massed in Poland, along with the intention of cutting Germany off from its sources of oil and other supplies of raw materials in the Balkans. Although the strategic plans (1940-41) before it are essentially the same in offensive principle, the May Plan specifically envisioned a preemptive strike on German forces. It is highly unlikely that Timoshenko and Zhukov would have made such a plan if they had not been ordered to do so by Stalin. This would seem to indicate that Timoshenko and Zhukov were presenting Stalin, in response to an order given by him, a detailed strategic plan for a first strike against Germany, including a prescription of the forces that would be required to achieve victory, and were leaving it to him to nominate a target date for launching the first strike.

In his post-war memoirs, Zhukov claimed that Stalin had rejected the plan, but we cannot accept this claim without reservations since Khrushchev's destalinization period provided its context. The political undertones of such a message would thus hold Stalin responsible for the Soviet Union's catastrophic start to the war. The available evidence

also confirms Stalin's belief that Hitler would first finish the war with the West, causing Britain to surrender, before launching an invasion of the Soviet Union. This would further point towards Stalin's ambition of building up the Red Army until it was strong enough of defeating the German forces in a preemptive strike. Since 1939, we can conclude that Stalin was preparing for a future war with Germany – in all likelihood for 1942 (as a suitable date for reaching the prescribed levels of armaments). This is supported by the strength of the Soviet military-industrial complex, which began its operation several years prior to the war, and peaked its production capacities in 1942. However, as apprehension of a German strike grew, Stalin's initial schedule for an offensive had to be accelerated. Stalin approved the May Plan, ordered it into effect and Red Army forces began to deploy – fulfilling the preliminary stages of mobilization, while hoping that the German attack would keep stalling.

Ultimately, the reason why the Red Army could not launch its pre-emptive strike before the German invasion is that Timoshenko and Zhukov had completely misjudged the readiness to attack of the German forces. They thought that the German forces were still in the middle of their build-up, and that it would not be completed for several weeks. It was not until a couple of days before 22 June when the German armoured formations began to arrive on the frontier, that the Red Army commanders realized that the German invasion was imminent.

The intention of the Timoshenko-Zhukov plan was to catch the German forces in the midst of an offensive deployment, when they would not be in a defensive position. The calculation was based on the notion that a surprise attack would give the Red Army

the advantage. Instead, it was the Wehrmacht that caught the Red Army in the midst of its own deployment, rather than in a defensive position, giving the German forces an advantage and the ability to achieve great success during the first few weeks of the invasion.

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